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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1909.

THE GOVERNMENT'S KINDNESS TO G. P. TAFT AND OTHERS.

Now the government's liberal suit against two newspapers has actually taken definite form with the indictment of the publishers and the issuance of bench warrants requiring their presence in Washington. Both newspapers announce, as was expected, that they will resist extradition. To argue from this that they are made timid by conscious guilt is to pre-judge the case with a vengeance. In the opinion of the country, well warranted by the facts, these men are under no shameful cloud, the instant removal of which is demanded by a common sense of honor and ordinary self-respect. They are by no means viewed as deliberate and malicious character assassins. The accusation against them is simply that they have overstepped the bounds of what is lawful in criticisms, and in directing attention to supposedly suspicious circumstances in the case of certain individuals. The question of what does, and what does not, constitute libel, is not a moral question. It is a technical question of law, to be technically adjudicated. Moreover these men are asked to face in court a complainant backed by the most boundless resources in the world. They are quite right to fight every inch of the way that lies between them and a learned court ruling on what criminal libel is.

If these two papers, which Mr. Roosevelt has his own reason for disliking—the New York World and the Indianapolis News—have really libeled anybody, they should be punished, and doubtless they will be. But the question whether or not they committed this offense has long since become a minor consideration. The overshadowing issue now is as to whether the United States government is justified in bringing suit in the name of offended individuals, at its own option, against newspapers which are supposed to have injured these individuals.

It has been evident enough that the government has had difficulties in finding even legal justification for such a theory of procedure. In the first shower of angry language, Mr. Roosevelt referred to the "libel on the United States government," a misapprehension which Attorney-General Bonaparte doubtless promptly corrected. The warrants now issued mention certain individuals as the parties libeled. It was necessary, too, to go to rather desperate straits to provide the United States with proper jurisdiction in the matter. This was finally accomplished with the aid of an old law which gave such jurisdiction in the case of crimes committed on Federal ground. Federal ground includes the District of Columbia and 2,889 separate Government reservations. There are few newspapers of any consequence in the country which do not find their way to some of this "ground" and which, consequently, are not liable to Federal prosecution at the discretion of any President who may be offended by their criticisms of him and his friends.

This is the situation, and it is in this sense that these newspapers are fighting a battle for the freedom of the press. It is not, as some appear to imagine, a liberty to utter slanderous statements with impunity that is here defended. It is the liberty of newspapers to be responsible for what they say about individuals to those individuals, and not to the United States government. It is the liberty from whimsical Federal oppression. If Theodore Roosevelt, C. P. Taft and others feel themselves to have been slandered they may take their case to court and fight it out at their own expense, as the two defendants are now compelled to do. Why should the government undertake to clear the names of these gentlemen for them? Why should the people of the United States pay the expenses of balancing the feelings and saving the pride of William Nelson Cromwell? We inquire to know. If the powerful resources of the government are to be exerted in behalf of Mr. Roosevelt's friends and relations, are they similarly at the disposal of humble John Jones, of Richmond or Norfolk?

It may be argued that it is of importance to the people of the United States that their government, or the men who make it up, shall not be subject to slanderous accusations. We may well reply that it is of far more importance to the people that their newspapers shall not be intimidated and browbeaten from speaking their minds. Few newspapers are financially able to stand a long drawn out suit with the United States government. The fear of being drawn into such litigation, at the option of a President, will inevitably tend to silence them. If Mr. Roosevelt is interested in doing what is of most importance to the people, rather than gratifying his own wounded vanity,

and that of his friends and relatives, has he not taken the wrong side in this case? Might he not rather more reasonably have thrown the vast powers of the government behind the liberty of the two newspapers and against the individual suits of Messrs. C. P. Taft, Robinson, Cromwell and the others?

PARCELS POSTS IN THE COUNTRY.

The joint committees of the Chamber of Commerce were considerably divided the other night on the question of parcels posts. The general argument of progressiveness and benefit to the buying classes met, as usual, the counter argument of damage to the jobber and the country merchant, and neither would yield a jot or tittle. It is not surprising that Mr. Laird and Mr. Freeman were in something of a quandary as to what form of resolution they should take to the chamber in the sense of their committee.

But with the modest parcels post plan authorized by the post-office appropriation bill reported to the Senate on Wednesday, we fancy that none of the members will quarrel. This bill provides for the establishment of an experimental rural parcels delivery in two counties, to be designated by the Postmaster-General. Mr. Meyer has testified his belief that a general rural delivery for packages would not at least \$16,000,000 a year of revenue. The idea now is to try out the scheme on a small scale. The service will cost the government nothing, as there are no transportation charges to pay. The rural carrier is to receive packages at the post-office or at points along his route, stow them away in his buggy, and drop them off at other points. The service enables the farmer to have packages of less than eleven pounds weight delivered from the merchants or his post-office town at a very low rate indeed.

How far legislation must consider the interests of a class, as let us say, the small merchants, when these interests are in conflict with the interests of the great majority of the people, may safely be left to consider when there is any prospect of a national parcels post system. Meanwhile, the rural parcels delivery, as we see it, can injure nobody. So far from reducing the sales of the village merchant, it should stimulate them. At the same time it will enable the country dweller to get many of his supplies set down at his door at but a fraction of what he would pay for such a service now.

ONE PRIMARY OR TWO?

In defending its contention that one primary for both city and state nominations is better than two, the esteemed News Leader rather beg the question at issue. It cheerfully takes it for granted that there will be separate pledges for the two sets of officers. If this were a recognized fact, instead of a rather attenuated hope, the Times-Dispatch would never have offered any objections to the joint primary plan. But the facts promise to be quite the other way. The City Committee will determine this matter, and those of this body who have been heard from do not favor separate pledges. We think it safe to say that this represents the sentiments of the majority, and that the committee, if left to itself, will declare for a joint ballot headed by a single pledge covering all nominations.

The Times-Dispatch has already pointed out that, so far as can be seen now, the matter is, practically, of comparatively small importance in the present case. But the principle is an unsound one, from a tactical point of view, and should be distinctly discouraged. Every time the tying together of two different primaries is authorized, it helps to fasten the principle more firmly upon the community. Pretty soon a point will have been reached where it can be argued that "we have always done it." In time will come elections in which men's feelings are much more deeply involved than they are in these, and they will stay out of the primary rather than be bound to two sets of results by a single vote. It need not be pointed out how the effect of such a contingency would be unfortunate.

THE MARINES.

In their hour of need it developed that the marines have a lot of friends who remember their fine record for service and are reluctant to see them interfered with. Of the twelve Senators who voted in favor of removing the marines from all battleships and armored cruisers, only three may be said to have voted strictly with an open mind upon the merits of the question. For Mr. Knox and Mr. Lodge are good administration men, and Messrs. Borah, Bourne, Brown, Burkett, Cummings, Dixon and La Follette are of the "insurgents," whose role is to stand against the majority regardless. With this fact in mind, and with fifty-one Senators taking the marines' side of the issue, the vote in their favor may be said to have been almost unanimous.

It is not to be supposed, however, that a friendly feeling toward these "soldiers-and-sailors, too," alone dictated the decision of the Senate. There were other considerations. The President's argument was that the presence of the marines was resented by the sailors, and that removing them meant greater efficiency. In January Rear-Admiral Sperry cabled from Naples to say that "the efficiency of ships having no marines has been increased." But Congress appeared skeptical of this argument, and darkly glimpsed a desire to enlarge the naval establishment by devious ways. Brigadier-General Elliott, of the marine corps, introduced figures before the Naval Committee to show that his men were as accurate and effective at the targets as the sailors. Admiral Pillsbury, who favored the removal order, was compelled to admit that in forty years

experience on various ships, he could recall no single instance of friction between marines and any other enlisted men. Moreover, there was the question of expense. The function of the marines on board ship is neither purely police nor mainly ornamental. On the contrary, they perform various manual labors of a highly important sort, which either they or other persons must continue to do. To relieve them of these duties meant that some 2,100 additional bluejackets would have to be drawn into the service to take their places, and this meant a substantial enlargement of the naval budget.

It is not necessary to read into the action of the Senators any desire to "rebut" the President. Nearly every consideration of intelligence and economy was behind what they did, as well as the very general sentiment of the country.

Mr. Fairbanks is going on a tour round the world shortly after March 1. It is hardly likely, though, that he will run upon any old friends in the wilds of Africa.

From Houston, Tex., comes a stunning photograph of Colonel George Waitecoat Bailey, sole proprietor of the only alligatoring vest in the world. A close scrutiny of Col. Bailey's features reveals that he has lost flesh since his reluctant departure from Richmond, the grub hub of the universe.

Texas also has a John Wesley Orting, and this one is reported as officiating at the laying of a cornerstone the other day. A certain garrulity seems to be predestined for this particular collection of prau- and cog-nomina.

Houston, according to the authoritative Post, is still in her usual serene and sun-kissed condition. And those poor old widows, we doubt not, are still in their usual serene and sun-kissed condition.

Those Wisconsin fellows seem to be a little grasping. If \$108,000 isn't enough for a senatorial candidate to pay, what is the price of a seat out there, anyway?

Birmingham, England, turns out 22,000,000 steel pens a day. Thus this one British city is able to supply the entire demand of the White House under its present occupant.

Still, considering that it was his first affair with the Constitution since his appointment as Secretary of State, we see it, can injure nobody. So far from reducing the sales of the village merchant, it should stimulate them.

Still, that is something to tell the machine, isn't it?

It is also a sweetly solemn thought that this winter's overcoat will be like it if it was new next year.

PERMANENT TARIFF COMMISSION.

APPARENTLY the only question is whether by a straight back and 3 a run around the end. There is never a suspicion that its line will stand solid.

St. Louis Republic.

Woman's rights wins at Annapolis. Her a "best girl" may wear her middle's sweater.—Boston Record.

A Virginia person wants a law enacted prohibiting dancing. And others are clamoring for one prohibiting smoking. Oh, yesh! Let's cheer up!—Washington Herald.

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WISDOM IN SMALL DOSES.

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PERSONAL AND GENERAL.

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COFFEE DUTY AND POLITICS.

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IMPORTS RECOVERING.

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BRITISH POST-OFFICE.

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NEW YORK OYSTER INDUSTRY.

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BRITISH CONSULAR AND TRADE REPORTS.

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CASTORIA.

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